PRESERVING

the

CULTURAL HERITAGE

of

AFGHANISTAN

PROCEEDINGS of the INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE HELD at KABUL UNIVERSITY, NOVEMBER 2014

edited by

Gil J. Stein, Michael T. Fisher, Abdul Hafiz Latify,
Najibullah Popal, and Nancy Hatch Dupree

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Cover Illustration

National Museum of Afghanistan Conservator Shirazuddin
Saify works on a restored Bodhisattva statue from Tepe
Maranjan, Kabul, after it was destroyed by the Taliban.

Photo courtesy of Kenneth Garrett

Design by Charissa Johnson

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TECHNOLOGY AND HUMANITIES: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE FUTURE OF AFGHAN CULTURAL HERITAGE

Anna Filigenzi

Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan (MAIA)

[The archaeologist] is primarily a fact-finder, but his facts are the material records of human achievement; he is also, by that token, a humanist, and his secondary task is that of revivifying or humanizing his materials with a controlled imagination that inevitably partakes of the qualities of art and even of philosophy (Wheeler 2004 [1954], p. 200).

INTRODUCTION

Over the course of the last two decades the area of intersection between technology and humanities has experienced noticeable growth. However, the way that the two fields have merged into each other seems not to have been harmonious and advantageous. Rather, humanities have been progressively edged from the arena, now dominated, as far as cultural heritage is concerned, by technology-based projects in restoration, digital humanities, 3D data acquisition, and objects' reconstruction, rarely combined with scientific research in cultural history or, even worse, often wrapped in superficial and out-of-date cultural notions. The actual practice of research in cultural studies languishes, not only in the field but also in the universities, overcome by the economic attractiveness and easier applicability of a flexible know-how. Indeed, it is becoming urgent to involve humanities and technologies in the formulation of new methodological questions. This need is particularly crucial in contexts such as today's Afghanistan, where the young generations of scholars must face not only the still difficult conditions of the present, but also the void created by more than twenty years of isolation from the international scene of scientific research and relevant debate on methods and standards.

The risk nowadays is the general tendency to bypass serious scientific gaps with a fake cultural modernism in which the use of technology is not the auxiliary tool of a scientific project, but the project itself. Under emergency circumstances, a purely technological approach may represent a necessary shortcut. By no means, however, can it replace the humanistic aspect of research, which certainly proceeds at a different speed with respect to drones and laser-scanning. Unfortunately, this seems to become progressively cut off from projectuality and disowned by the same cultural agencies that should nurture analytical scientific research, under the pressure of a growing competitiveness imposed by the spread of a market's logic.

The "crisis" of humanities is not a new issue but rather a cyclic occurrence (cf. Paul 2014, p. 8 esp.), if not an intrinsic problem of humanities education. However, the growing impact of technology, together with the expansion of a cultural market which demands to be visually and quickly advertised through digital media, is producing a gap between information and knowledge. Creativity is more and more equated with production. On the other hand, archaeology, historiography, art history, social anthropology, codicology, numismatics, and other similar disciplines require long-term investments in terms of individual and institutional commitment. Moreover, they usually yield no immediately spectacular results but rather a constant flow of knowledge, which is nonetheless crucial to advancements and innovations. Thus, it happens that, while in many countries — also in the face of a prolonged economic recession — this type of investing is decreasing, a negative public perception is growing about humanities, which are often regarded as backward looking, tedious, and unproductive.

Against this background, weaker study fields such as non-Western humanities, still under construction as far as repertories of categorized data, thesauri, and specific analytical methodologies are concerned, instead of developing their own solidity and independence, are reverting to unsuitable paradigms that long ago were borrowed, as a temporary loan, from Western disciplines. The last decades of research, which had laboriously started introducing innovative standpoints, aims, enquiries, and interpretive models, are at risk of remaining totally neglected while a paradoxical modernity prospers in dismissed theories, underrated historical gaps, and cultural biases. In the world of Western archaeology or art history it would simply be impossible for "modern" approaches (of whatever level and content) to ignore the difference between Etruscan and Greek, Renaissance and Baroque, or Flemish and Spanish. Instead, when South- and Central-Asian cultural history are concerned, every imprecision or bias is then admissible: the lost Colossi of Bamiyan are "Gandharan," Gandharan artifacts are either "Greek-Buddhist" or "Roman-Buddhist," Kushans have a vague "nomadic" identity, and Huns are mainly considered a barbarous and disrupting factor in the civilized, Hellenized Orient.

A vague historical narrative is reiterated, based on obdurate paradigms both of cultural and aesthetic nature. Is it this old-fashioned view that is to arrive, further simplified and imprecise, in the school books that we wish for Afghan children? Why we do not feel, when dealing with ancient Afghan world, the uneasiness we would feel for any comparable scientific inaccuracy in research into the ancient Mediterranean world?

Thus, unless we accept that Afghan cultural heritage may grow as an idiosyncratic collection of monuments and art objects, it is necessary to re-establish a balance between technology and the humanities. If we neglect the latter (in Afghanistan as anywhere else), we neglect the necessary groundwork for adequately addressing the material evidence from the past, correctly contextualizing it, and eventually historicizing its meaning. No true intellectual renovation, capable of equalizing the dignity of all cultures in a global-history perspective, can develop without investing in the progress of humanistic sciences. Moreover, the idea that a purely technical approach may guarantee objectivity is a modern myth. Correct methods of excavation, restoration, data collection, and analysis depend largely on contextual knowledge. The preliminary step towards science-based research is not simply technology, but technological humanities, capable of making innovative enquiries and producing non-dogmatic answers.

We may say that in Afghanistan, as anywhere else, cultural heritage is threatened not only by intentional destruction or negligence but by a kind of ingenuous faith that technology has a productive value in itself. This creates a false dichotomy. While humanities cannot be divorced from technology, even more so, technology cannot work in the field of humanities without scientific planning based on a rigorous humanistic culture. Archaeology creates and analyzes archaeological records; speed and accuracy are being sensibly increased by more and more sophisticated tools such as total station theodolites, GPS, GIS, and 3D-laser scanning. Art history is not a mere list of beautiful artifacts, but rather an analytical process that aims at framing art in history, that is, recognizing the cultural, aesthetic, and social value of visual forms of communications. Its horizon is being progressively expanded by digital archiving and sophisticated physical-chemical analyses.

However, not even the most sophisticated tool kit can provide accurate — and, what is more, usable — data collection without a "humanistic" understanding that is interdisciplinary in nature and evaluative and orientative in praxis. This is in-so-far as it establishes connections, organizes conceptual frameworks, envisages new research lines and actions, monitors the progress of the latter, and evaluates their outcomes. Cultural heritage is a reconstruction that implies a workflow process, starting from digging and/or surveying, consolidating and preserving physical materials, and correctly collecting data in order to make them accessible for further analysis. Then the data have to be correctly filed, interpreted, and published. The final goal is not merely preserving tangible objects but safeguarding their intangible value — that is, making their cultural and historical meaning survive into the present.

TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: TWO INSEPARABLE CONCEPTS

Recent history has made us confront dramatic conflicts that deliberately or accidentally annihilate significant relics of the past. The destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas and its media impact marked a turning point in terrorist strategies and has become a tragic symbol of ideologically driven cultural vandalism. Yet, similarly to sentient beings, monuments and art objects can be not only the targets but the unfortunate,

casual victims of terrorist attacks. This was the case on September 4, 2014, with the small temporary Museum of Islamic Art that the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan (hereafter MAIA),[1] at the request of H.E. Mohammad Musa Khan Akbarzada and the Director of the Afghan Museums, Omara Khan Massoudi, had set up in Ghazni inside the Governorate compound. Two powerful blasts targeted the entrance to the compound and, besides the heavy loss of life and large number of injured, caused serious damages to buildings, including the museum. Many art objects were destroyed or irreparably damaged. Sad as the physical disappearance of the objects may be, there is at least one thing in our favor: the documentation that in the late 1950s — the time of the excavations and surveys from which the objects had come — had been thoroughly collected, filed, and made available to future generations of scholars. This documentation was the object of a careful reassessment and study carried on since the early 2000s, when the MAIA, re-organized (and directed until 2003) by Giovanni Verardi, returned to active status.[2] Besides scientific publications and dissemination activities, the MAIA, thanks to a project financed by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, has created a digital platform containing the archival documentation (graphic, photographic, and descriptive) pertaining to the archaeological sites — both pre-Islamic and Islamic — excavated and surveyed by the MAIA (see fn. 2).

The way the materials are presented follows models of categorization derived from the analytical studies of the objects and their original contexts. As involved experts could largely experience over the last decades, categorization represents one of the most delicate issues that the intersection between humanities and digital technology has to face. Though digital technology has introduced new possibilities such as conceptual clustering, where the categories are not preliminarily defined but generated by the descriptions, the need for a supervised process of categorization can by no means be avoided. Even if clusters of mutually related objects could be created by the machine, the problem remains that the process of clustering, being based on the description, requires descriptions that are as coherent and uniform as possible. Thus, descriptions must be based on precise and shared thesauri in order to allow the software to establish a link between similar objects, at the same time avoiding miscategorization and/or over-categorization that would make the database unmanageable and queries potentially fallacious.[3] Therefore, in digital archives even more so than in paper-based archives, the unavoidable first step towards efficiency and usability is the preliminary process of recognition and differentiation of the objects, which can be provided only by humanities research and its analytical methods.

On a much larger scale than the Islamic Museum of Ghazni, in the recent past the Kabul National Museum also experienced serious damage and destruction which affected the building, the collections as well as the paper-based archives.[4] The total and resolute commitment of Dr. Massoudi and his staff, supported by the solidarity of the international community, has produced the miracle of reopening a fully renovated museum (see Massoudi, this volume). There are things that are lost forever but many others have been

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[1] The Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan (MAIA), presently directed by the author, was established in 1957 by Giuseppe Tucci in the framework of the scientific activities of the IsMEO (Italian Institute for the Middle and Far East), afterwards IsIAO (Italian Institute for Africa and the Orient, since 1995). From 1967 until the suspension of field activities in 1979, the MAIA was directed by Maurizio Taddei; the investigations into the Islamic period, initiated by Alessio Bombaci, were further carried out by Umberto Scerrato and Dinu Adamesteanu. Following the closing down of IsIAO in 2011, the MAIA was administered by the University of Naples 'L'Orientale'. Since 2017 it is administrated by the ISMEO (International Association of Mediterranean and Oriental Studies), which was established in 2012 to take over the scientific legacy of the former IsMEO and IsIAO. For an overview of the work of the Italian Archaeological Mission in Afghanistan and a related bibliography, I refer, in addition to Filigenzi and Giunta 2009, to the Mission's website *Buddhist and Islamic Archaeological Data from Ghazni, Afghanistan. A multidisciplinary digital archive for the managing and preservation of an endangered cultural heritage* (funded by the Gerda Henkel Stiftung) http://ghazni.bradypus.net/ (accessed October 20, 2017).

[2] In particular, since 2004 the documentation about Islamic materials is being re-assessed and studied in the framework of the project "Islamic Ghazni," led by Roberta Giunta, deputy director of the MAIA.

[3] As a relevant case in point, let me mention the illustrated *Repertory of Terms for Cataloguing Gandharan Sculptures* (Faccenna and Filigenzi 2007) created exactly in support of digital archiving, with the aim of minimizing inconsistencies in the classification and description of the materials and resulting loss of performance of the relational databases.

[4] In spring 1993 rockets destroyed the roof and upper floors; in the autumn another rocket destroyed the basement. Though the remaining artifacts were moved to the best protected area of the building, the museum suffered heavy losses and looting, which the United Nations tried (unsuccessfully) to stop in 1994 by repairing the doors and bricking the windows. In 2001 the Taliban intentionally vandalized pre-Islamic and non-Islamic art objects, mostly stone and clay Buddhist sculptures and wooden Nuristani sculptures.

restored. Moreover, the digitization of the museum's inventories marks the beginning of a new, additional strategy for the preservation of cultural heritage.[5] We cannot avoid or predict the loss of tangible heritage, as we cannot avoid or predict the various causes of it, such as conflicts, natural disasters, negligence, and time-dependent deterioration. However, we can secure the preservation of the intangible aspects of material culture through knowledge, documentation, and transmission.

DOCUMENTATION, HUMANITIES, AND TECHNOLOGY: HOW TOGETHER THEY CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

At the resumption of the activities in Afghanistan, the MAIA, as all the other agencies committed to cultural heritage, had to face the manifold problems connected with the rebuilding of a patrimony of knowledge after the long hiatus in field research and related studies.

The restored archaeological mission started its activities with the survey of the archaeological sites and materials as well as the relevant documentation, as a preparatory work aimed at a full resumption of field activity. With the exception of Giovanni Verardi and Elio Paparatti, who had been members of the MAIA in the 1970s, all the members of the team were completely new to field activities in Afghanistan but not to Afghan cultural history. Even during the years of forced absence from the country, the foremost representatives of the MAIA such as M. Taddei, U. Scerrato, and G. Verardi, all brilliant academics, had kept the interest for Afghanistan alive among new generations of scholars through their studies and teachings. Thus, there were the conditions for boosting new scientific plans, but instrumental to any initiative was the reassessment and contextual analytical study of the archival materials (lists of inventoried objects, field notes, a large number of drawings of different sizes, and thousands of photographs) that were kept at the Centro Scavi of the IsIAO and the Museo Nazionale d'Arte Orientale "Giuseppe Tucci." We were also confronted with the need to convert pre-existing hardcopy archives into digital format. This was too huge a task for our limited staffing and resources, and up until now we have only been able to partially complete it. Priority was given to the inventories (and, when available, field notes), which were supplemented with a relevant, basic photographic apparatus.

Besides the fundamental contribution of the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, which allowed a dedicated project to be carried out, a part of the grants that the MAIA gets each year from the funding institutions is regularly allocated to digitization.[6] Given the large amount of materials and insufficient resources, the stages of advancements have been established according to the most urgent requirements of the scientific projects that since the very beginning have paralleled the reassessment of the documentation.

As mentioned above, steps were taken in order to resume field research in the area of Ghazni, where the MAIA was traditionally based. At the end of the 1970s, when the political situation put an end to all foreign cultural activities in the country, the MAIA had already set up a Museum of Islamic Art at Rawza to display the art objects yielded by the archaeological excavations and surveys of Islamic sites (mainly Ghaznavid and Ghurid) carried out by the MAIA in the area of Ghazni. This museum, opened in 1966, represents a double achievement, insofar as its physical seat is the Timurid 'Abd al-Razzaq mausoleum (sixteenth century CE), which the MAIA had purposely restored as a museum. A museum within a historical monument: this was part of a general — and at that time extremely innovative — strategy of territorial promotion of cultural

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[5] Important preparatory steps towards this direction were made, especially from 2003 onwards, by various international agencies (UNESCO, SPACH), donor countries (Austria, France, Greece, Italy, the United Kingdom and the United States of America) and specialised institutions (British Museum, Musée Guimet, ICCR, and IsIAO), which assisted in the overall rehabilitation of the museum's building, the assessment of the survived collections, the restoration of the objects, and the training of museum professionals. A unified program of digitization was launched in May 2012 by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, under the direction of Gil Stein and field direction of Mike Fisher. It has so far inventoried approximately 95 percent of the Afghan museums' collections, including any provincial museum holdings. For more information see Fisher, this volume.

[6] The MAIA, as the other archaeological missions of the former IsMEO/IsIAO, and of the ISMEO at present, was financially supported by a kind of partnership with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and, on the basis of specific agreement by the University of Naples "L'Orientale"

heritage as a source of cultural, social, and economic development.[7] In the original plan, an archaeological promenade should have been taken to the Buddhist and Islamic sites of Ghazni, and to the museums where the visitors would have seen on display the artifacts that could not be preserved in situ. Indeed, a museum of Pre-Islamic Art was also planned, which should have housed, parallel to the Museum of Islamic Art, the pre-Islamic art objects, mainly coming from the Buddhist site of Tepe Sardar. In 1979, when the MAIA was compelled to stop its activities, this second museum was still under construction. However, it had been rapidly brought to a stage that was sufficiently advanced for the building to be able to function as a temporary storage facility for the archaeological materials.

In 2002, when the MAIA returned to Afghanistan, a basic electronic copy of the inventories and relevant photographic documentation provided a flexible and extremely manageable tool for a first, quick survey of the materials in the storage building of Ghazni and the Kabul National Museum, to which part of the materials had been transferred at some point in time. The MAIA also discovered in the storage building the finds previously on display in the Museum of Islamic Art, which had been prudently evacuated by order of the local authorities during the period of political unrest. As a further measure to reduce danger, the storage building had been partially obstructed with debris in order to make it less accessible and attractive for possible looters.

Most of the artifacts had survived intact the tormented years of war, also thanks to those protection strategies adopted by the Afghan authorities and local people. However, the safekeeping of cultural artifacts is a chain of actions that begins even before bringing them to light. Unless discoveries are purely accidental, standard protocol interventions must be envisaged before, during, and after archaeological surveys and excavations. These procedures are particularly crucial to the survival of fragile materials such as clay sculptures and painted plasters, which abound in Afghanistan. Careful excavation methods, consolidation and stabilization before removal from the find spot, and restoration with appropriate techniques and compatible materials in the post-excavation phase allow the objects to maintain their physical shape. From this point of view, one may say that the strategies adopted by the MAIA in the course of the past activities had proved successful. However, for the resumption and further advancement of the studies, even more essential than the physical objects was the set of all relevant information connected to each of them. Exact size, physical features and components of the artifacts, their stratigraphic provenance, find spot, and general archaeological context had been carefully recorded by the MAIA through written inventories, photographs, and, when needed, also drawings.

The efficacious management of the overall process (digging, restoration, documentation, and records storage) adopted by the "old" MAIA allowed the "new" MAIA to effectually restart scientific projects that had been left unaccomplished, or even devise fresh plans and take new steps, also thanks to the incremental developments in technology that occurred meanwhile.

It is significant, for instance, that the return of the MAIA to the field was inaugurated by two important scientific publications (Giunta 2003; Verardi and Paparatti 2004), which are based entirely on the old documentation. Furthermore, the survey of both archaeological materials and archival documentation was simultaneously accompanied by new plans of graphic restitutions that can be considered somehow a continuation of previous experiences and are partly based on the old graphic sources of the 1960s and 1970s. I do not speak about the new information and knowledge provided by the archaeological activities of the reconstituted MAIA; for this I refer the reader to the considerable amount of scientific works that has been published so far (see fn. 42). I limit myself to a description of some ongoing studies and (still preliminary) achievements which can give the reader an idea of how the combination of extant archival documentation, scholarly research and technology can actively help us not only to better understand the archaeological monuments and artifacts unearthed in the past but also to sharpen our focus on the current and future research on Afghan cultural heritage.

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[7] The building has recently been restored with the assistance of the Department of Afghan Historic Monuments thanks to funds granted by UNESCO and the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. However, the degraded conditions of security and infrastructures in the Ghazni province have so far prevented the re-opening of the museum.

Similarly, the National Museum Herat was redeveloped to reside inside of the city's historic citadel, Qala-e Ikhtiyaruddin (see Shaikhzada, this volume).

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORD AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL SIMULATION

One of the first tasks of the reconstituted MAIA was the graphic rendering of exemplary monuments and architectures. These were selected on the basis of their suitability to partial integrations; that is, a sufficient preservation of indicative elements, which could lend a degree of verisimilitude to the restitution. Serviceable starting points were found in the old graphic records made at the time of the excavations and surveys by well-trained professionals,[8] under direct examination and the supervision of expert archaeologists and art historians. Some outstanding artifacts and modular units, as well as ground plans and elevations, had been given special attention, with the clear aim of developing, step by step, comprehensive restitutions of the original contexts. The partial achievements that had been already obtained could be taken as a reliable guide towards new tactical options and eventual advancements.

As for the Buddhist site of Tepe Sardar, worth noticing among the old records are the graphic restitution of a colossal bejewelled Buddha (reconstructed height ca. 3.7 m) in Chapel 23 (Taddei and Verardi 1978, fig. 11; here, fig. 57); the plausible combination of different units in coherent decorative patterns (ibid., figs. 29–31); the table of mould types used for casting ornamental devices (both for sculptures and architectural decorations), parts of human and animal bodies, and small figurines (ibid., pp. 121–31); and the careful mapping of significant archaeological indicators. Included among these indicators, for instance, is the find spot of materials fallen from their original positions, with particular regard to sculptural fragments and burnt wooden fragments (ibid., fig. 8) that may prove essential to reconstruction processes.

As far as rendering was concerned, the new MAIA focused its attention on an overview of the general aspect of the Upper Terrace, i.e. the leveled top of the hill where the main cultic area of the site was installed. This was composed of a Main Stūpa, at the centre of the terrace, that was surrounded by wings of chapels, originally enclosed within an external wall forming a corridor behind them, and, on the northwest and southwest sides, rows of alternating star-shaped small *stūpa*s and enthroned images of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

The state of preservation of the monuments was quite modest. Of the Main Stūpa — the largest ever found in Afghanistan — only the first two square stories were preserved. The buildings lining the entrance, on the northwest side, as well as the row of chapels on the southeast side and the perimeter wall, had almost completely disappeared, wiped away by natural processes of erosion. Also, of the rows of small *stūpa*s and enthroned figures only the lower part was preserved. As for the extant chapels, they had survived to a maximum height of ca. 2.5 m. Only scanty traces of their decorative apparatus were found in situ. For the most part, this was found fallen from the original position and mixed up with the archaeological debris layers, either irremediably destroyed by the impact and the atmospheric agents or badly damaged and fragmented. Nevertheless, the general layout of the chapels was still documentable, as well as some important clues at the original iconographic programs (Taddei and Verardi 1978, passim; Filigenzi 2009a, b).

On the basis of the old ground plans, elevations, photographic documentation, and reports a preliminary work was made towards a 3D reconstruction of the Upper Terrace (fig. 58). The old graphic reconstruction of decorative patterns was integrated into broader isometric views (fig. 59). Also, close-up views of the chapels are being studied, starting from Chapel 17, where the main cultic figure was a colossal Maitreya depicted as an accomplished Buddha (fig. 60).

Moreover, another step was taken towards the reconstruction of Chapel 23, from which the colossal bejewelled Buddha came. This was originally placed against the left side wall of the chapel, facing another colossal image, of almost equal size, of the goddess Durgā (Taddei 1992), the slayer of the buffalo demon Mahiṣa whose deeds are recorded in the Hindu religious literature. A number of variants of the story are known from the Purāṇas, especially the Mārkaṇḍeyapurāṇa, which contains the earliest (and simplest)

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[8] I would like to mention here the noteworthy work by Nicola Labianca and Giovanni Ioppolo, who worked under the supervision of the field directors, Maurizio Taddei (pre-Islamic archaeology and art history) and Alessio Bombaci and Umberto Scerrato (Islamic archaeology and art history), respectively. Following the resumption of the activities in the early 2000s, fresh additions to the MAIA's graphic resources came from highly qualified experts in architectural and archaeological drawings such as Elio Paparatti, Francesco Martore, and Danilo Rosati. Mention must also be made of the significant contributions of our graduate students of the University of Naples 'L'Orientale,' in particular Donatella Ebolese and Annamaria Fedele, and Carlotta Passaro (University of Naples Federico II).

version of the myth.[9] According to this, the mighty demon Mahiṣa, disguised as a bull, had taken over power on earth and heaven and was throwing the cosmos into chaos. Having being granted by the god Brahmā with the boon that no males could kill him, he was unsuccessfully fought by the gods Indra, Śiva, and Viṣṇu. Through their mental energy, the gods thus created a beautiful goddess and supplied her with replicas of their most powerful weapons, assigning her the task of defeating the demon. After a series of events, the multi-armed Durgā, assisted by her animal vehicle (a feline variously identified as a lion or tiger), eventually knocked down the buffalo and beheaded it. Mahiṣa then emerged from the severed head of the animal and the goddess promptly killed him.

The remains at Tepe Sardar of a colossal sculpture representing a multi-armed female deity trampling on a decapitated buffalo leave no doubts about the identification of the iconographic model, as it is not only largely documented in Indian iconography but also attested in Afghanistan by isolated sculptures from unknown settings (Kuwayama 1976, pp. 378–80). In particular, the most suitable comparison for our Durgā is represented by a marble sculpture from Gardez (preserved ht. 0.6 m; ibid., p. 379, fig. 9). The difference in the treatment of the buffalo's body, crouching at Tepe Sardar, and — as in the more common scheme — kneeling on the front legs in the Gardez sculpture, is dictated by the different performance of the materials, since more compact and stable masses are certainly advisable for huge clay sculptures.

The presence and significance of an apparently alien deity in a Buddhist context (Taddei 1992; Silvi Antonini 2005; Filigenzi 2009b), as well as the nature and origin of the goddess, is a matter of discussion (Tucci 1963; idem 1977, p. 28). I refer the reader to the relevant bibliography, while limiting myself here to the process and implications of the graphic anastylosis of the image.

The reconstructive hypothesis presented here (fig. 61) is still preliminary. There are major and minor details still missing, as for instance the presence of a canopy, which we imagine was made of light materials such as precious cloth on a wooden frame. This was suggested by the presence of small column bases and the remains of the shafts, and the plans documenting the excavation phases, where fragments of burnt wooden elements are shown in an archaeological layer of debris covering the original floor level. The goddess' dress, the position of the arms, and some of the mudrās and attributes remain a pure guess, only based on comparisons and specific considerations about technique, materials, compositional balance, and stability. On the other hand, the size and posture of the goddess are coherent with the extant elements. The aspect of the goddess' lion is modelled after figurines of lions brought to light at the site, but the presence of the animal is attested beyond any doubt by the paw clawing at the buffalo's rump. Similarly, the ornaments adorning the goddess are not invented but patterned after the examples provided by the sculptural assemblage of the site. All in all, therefore, the proposed reconstruction can be considered reliable. It might not be exactly corresponding to the original, but it is certainly plausible.

A positive impact that this study has had on ongoing archaeological research is also of note. The Durgā of Tepe Sardar was the only sure evidence of this goddess being adopted into Buddhist sacred spaces until 2012, when the site of Mes Aynak yielded an extraordinary equivalent. It must be stressed that without the precedent at Tepe Sardar, the surviving traces of a Durgā shrine at Mes Aynak would have passed completely unnoticed. During a visit to the site, Nicolas Engel showed me fragments of architectural decoration that he had correctly compared with extremely similar devices from Tepe Sardar. In addition, Mr. Nadir Rasouli pointed out to me the fragment of a big animal ear (12 cm long) from the same site. The coincidences were certainly significant, to the extent that we decided to inspect the site together. The fragments had been unearthed in a small four pillared chapel (32N) that had been almost completely destroyed by the fire. The only remains in situ were the lower part of the four wooden pillars, and a rectangular, oblong socle (length 2.4 m, width 0.9 m) placed against the wall opposite to the entrance (fig. 62). The unusual size and shape of the socle could be perfectly explained if the figure to be accommodated was the body of a crouching buffalo. With the help of Mr. Haji Ghulam Naqshband Rajabi, long-time local collaborator of the MAIA, we asked the workers who were cleaning the room whether any fragment of a big human figure had been found. They started rummaging among the debris and found a clay human finger of colossal size. The hypothesis of a lost Durgā group was thus proved almost certain.

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[9] For a quick overview and references see Flood 1996, pp. 175–76.

Investigating a site like Mes Aynak is incontrovertibly difficult: too huge is the site, too short is the time, too high is the pressure caused by a rescue excavation of uncertain duration (see Timuri, this volume).[10] Mes Aynak is not only one of the world's most important archaeological sites ever discovered, it is also the second largest copper deposit in the world. In spite of the universal agreement as to the cultural importance of the site, is the latter circumstance that creates expectations in an economically depressed country. Once again, culture is an investment that pays back more slowly and indirectly than the exploitation of a mine.

My intention is not to discuss at length such a delicate and complex issue, which would deserve a focused attention, but rather to point out that the practice of archaeology means something more than a collection of artifacts and monuments, and more than their physical and documentary safeguarding. The lost Durgā of Mes Aynak is just a telling and particularly blatant example of what archaeology should be: a full-scale investigation of all of the physical traces of the past, also — and especially — those that may allow us to bring disappeared evidence back to life.

The case of the Durgā of Mes Aynak is not just a question of a statue, it is a critical witness to a non-occasional adoption of specific icons in Buddhist contexts. Besides giving hints about the religious atmosphere of the time, the discovery also opens a window into the little-known system of art-making in the ancient Eastern world, offering us a glimpse into the workshops, artisans, mechanisms of artistic production, circulation of artistic models, and, most probably, of artisans as well. Indeed, the use of exactly the same moulds for decorative devices at Tepe Sardar and Mes Aynak (fig. 63) implies that either the moulds were produced and distributed over a vast area by specialized workshops, or specialized workshops owned specifically designed tool-kits and moved from site to site. As an alternative for the latter case, we may also suppose the existence of a kind of "branch workshops," possibly established along family lines and operating in different areas. Be that as it may, from these observations we can begin more concrete and innovative research into the basic underpinning of official monumental art; that is, the complex system of human and technical resources that make objects of art exist, and the political, social, and cultural network that allows artistic forms and related concepts to be shared, appreciated, and patronized.

A reconstruction of the rows of alternating star-shaped *stūpa*s and enthroned figures in the northwest and southwest sides of the Upper Terrace and, eventually, of the Upper Terrace in its entirety, is also under way. We started with the graphic anastylosis of an exemplifying type of each (a *stūpa* and a statue). While this is not the place to deal with the complex symbolic implications of these monuments and the logic of their spatial arrangement,[11] I would nonetheless like to stress their utmost relevance for the cultural history of Buddhism. They are, indeed, the early archaeological evidence of architectural and iconographic prototypes which will play, further developed in canonical forms, a key role in the art of Himalayan and Far-Eastern countries. Thus, they provide a link between apparently distant places and times, at the same time highlighting the central role of Afghanistan in the cultural history of Late Antiquity in Asia.

The extant remains of the monuments give only a partial picture of their original design and their impact on the overall aspect of the site. As for the *stūpa*s, only the lower part was preserved, in a few cases with scanty but indicative traces of the springing of the dome. This allowed us to approximately determine size and proportions of the monuments, which we found to be coincident with models reproduced at Tepe Sardar on decorative plaques as well as in coeval votive plaques and bronzes from Afghanistan and Central Asia, and on later Tibetan *ts'a ts'a* (figs. 64–65).

As for the thrones, the specimen selected for the reconstruction was that identified as no. 6 in the excavation reference system. This was the only one to preserve, besides the lower part of the seat, also part of the crossed legs and pelvis of the enthroned figure, which had completely disappeared in the other cases (figs. 64, 66). The drapery leaves no doubts about the type of dress, which is not the monastic mantle of a Buddha but the lower garment featuring a Bodhisattva figure, or a figure depicted like a Bodhisattva.

The two elephants supporting the seat hint at a figure of Buddha Akṣobhya being represented here. Although no linear explanation could be provided so far for the different iconographic features that the same

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[10] For a description of the results of the excavations, see Timuri, this volume.

[11] I refer the reader to Taddei and Verardi 1985; Filigenzi 2009b.

figure can take on in different contexts, the five cosmic Buddhas (among whom Akṣobhya is listed) are often represented in the same princely garb as the Bodhisattvas.

Following this hypothesis, the figure has been accordingly imagined as performing the bhumisparśamudrā (the touching-the-earth gesture). Details such as crown, ornaments, and arrangement of the hair are drawn from a range of suitable comparisons with the coeval sculptural production documented at Tepe Sardar. Conversely, other details could be reconstructed by assembling significant elements that were either sufficiently preserved in this or that throne or had been observed and scrupulously documented but were too fragile to survive, such as scanty traces of a body halo and nimbus.

As for the image of Durgā in Chapel 23, the thrones were also protected by a canopy, as evidenced by the small bases in front of the thrones, which on account of their modest size suggest slender columns of low-bearing capacity. Undoubtedly, these canopies were also made of light materials: a textile stretched on a wooden frame, the latter resting upon the columns in the front, and the back of the throne on the rear.

The thrones originally bore extremely rich decoration, either sculpted (in this case made of moulded elements such as jewel-like plaques and scroll motifs) or painted. However, complex decoration also characterized the front side of the thrones' back, as attested by the number of sculptural fragments which the excavators recovered among the debris in close proximity to the monuments. Not only mere decorative devices, also fragments of small statues were found, which we imagine were originally fixed to the solid support offered by the thrones' back. The latter thus played a multifunctional role: as a support for the main figure, for the animated scenery around this, and for the canopy. Judging from these elements, each single throne must have looked like a sort of shrine, in a way not dissimilar from models surviving in portable shrines from Kashmir and the Himalayas. For the time being, we limited our reconstruction to a preliminary sketch of the basic features of the throne, though not excluding further advancements towards more comprehensive hypotheses with regard not only to forms but also to the chromatic decoration.

Indeed, the role played by the polychrome treatment of the surfaces can hardly be overemphasized. Colors and gilding were evidently conceived as an essential component of the artistic production, not only for the purpose of beautification but for their magical and symbolic character. Although at Tepe Sardar, rare exceptions apart, only scanty traces survive of the original decorative finishing, investigation and documentation about the use of colors and gilding may open a window into the color-theories of the time, with specific reference to cultic places and objects. This is a promising yet difficult research path that requires a dedicated, long-term strategy of careful inspections of the materials, correctly designed sampling plan for chemical analyses, and a thorough, comparative methodology that, for the time being, remains restricted by limited available data and sporadic documentation. Once again, humanities ought to play a pivotal role in designing innovative plans and common information sharing standards, something that comes prior to technological applications and greatly advances the possibilities of the latter.

As for the Islamic period, the huge amount of documents relevant to Islamic funerary monuments in the area of Ghazni was the basis of the aforementioned study by R. Giunta (2003). However, the IsIAO archive also contained a number of notes and drawings pertinent to a Ghaznavid palace unearthed in Ghazni in the course of five excavation campaigns from 1957 to 1962 (Scerrato 1959; Adamesteanu 1960; Bombaci 1966).

The Palace, built of mud bricks in combination with pressed clay and baked bricks, was enclosed by an irregularly rectangular perimeter wall characterized by a monumental façade with ramparts and towers. The Palace was divided into a public area for administrative and ceremonial activities and a private quarter. A marble-paved central courtyard was surrounded by a sidewalk on to which four *iwans* opened axially. The southern one, opposite the entrance, provided access to the throne room, which in turn was flanked to the west by the residential quarter. A hypostyle mosque, with three naves parallel to the *qibli* wall, was located in the northwestern corner.

Among the major structures, mention must be made of the series of ante-chambers surrounding the central courtyard on four sides and, like the four *iwans*, bearing on the lower part of the walls a marble dado frieze. On top of this, a long poem in Persian and in Kufic script was carved (Bombaci 1966; fig. 67). The decoration of the wall was completed by brick panels with geometrical and epigraphic motifs. The impressing artistic mastery of the carving technique, the rich repertory and originality of decorative motifs, as well as the traces of color so far ascertained on both marble and brick panels (blue, red, and yellow), give an idea,

though vague and imprecise, of the powerful aesthetics of the Ghaznavid architecture and the profound mark it left on further artistic developments.

Hence, as it has been detailed in several specific publications (see fn. 1), the archaeological evidence provided by the MAIA's investigations largely confirms the accounts by the historian al-ʿUtbī (translation in Bombaci 1964, pp. 25, 31–32), who lived in Ghazni between the end of the tenth and the early eleventh century CE and witnessed the extensive use of polychrome and gilded carved marble for the decoration of the town's buildings.

However, the reconnaissance campaign made by M. Taddei in 1999 and the following ones in the early 2000s yielded depressing results. Of some of the archaeological sites either surveyed or investigated and restored by the old MAIA (including the Palace) only faint vestiges remained. Others, still extant, had suffered damages of various degrees.

This provided the new MAIA with an additional push to make use of the potential of the archival documentation as a countermeasure against the dispersal and destruction of the physical archaeological evidence.

The study on Ghaznavid funerary architecture and epigraphy having been already achieved, the attention of the "Islamic Ghazni" team (see fn. 2) focused on the Ghaznavid Palace. During the years of field activity, besides the photographic documentation, the most representative elements of the marble and brick decoration had been drawn. In addition, a preliminary elevation of the palace had been initiated by U. Scerrato, assisted by D. Rosati, in the 1990s (Scerrato 1995). Unfortunately, Scerrato could not bring it to completion, but the task was resumed with an expanded concept, which included the new possibilities allowed by digital formats. Also in view of the restoration and rehabilitation of the Museum of Islamic Art, the axonometric view of the palace was thus developed with the use of 3D computer graphics (figs. 68–69).

CONCLUSION

The results achieved so far only represent the tip of the iceberg, the most visible part of an obscure, painstaking work of information retrieval and collation, analytical study, and cross-comparisons. The deployment of human resources that led to the still partial results was made possible by dedicated investments in humanities. Doctoral and graduate students assisted at various levels in this project, each contributing, besides a generous participation in the re-organization of the archival records, an in-depth investigation on particular aspects of the Palace decoration, as well as the Ghaznavid history and epigraphy and, eventually, a digital (and critical) elaboration of the data.[12]

The analysis of the old data not only paved the way for new experiences in graphic reconstructions, but also yielded new discoveries. Contrary to what Scerrato hypothesised in his preliminary report (ibid., p. 26), the different phases of the Palace do not begin with the Ghaznavid sultans Ibrahim and Masʿud III (end of the eleventh-beginning of the twelfth century CE); the most magnificent phase can be assigned with certitude to them, but the history of the Palace begins prior to them, and possibly with a different function, the latter being the object of ongoing studies.

This is a further demonstration of how careful archaeological investigations and documentation are a living resource capable of bridging temporal gaps, but their potential can only be actuated by informed and motivated efforts. These can be assisted and boosted by technology, but it is certain that they can neither take shape nor reach the target independently from humanities.

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[12] Relevant contributions were provided by M. Rugiadi (marbles) and S. Artusi (brickwork) (unpublished PhD dissertations) and by Carlotta Passaro (3D graphics; MA thesis); ongoing PhD studies are also expected to provide valuable additions to our knowledge of funerary and celebratory inscriptions (M. Massullo and V. Allegranzi, respectively) and of metalwork (V. Laviola). For further details visit http://ghazni.bradypus.net/islamic_blog (accessed July 12, 2017).

Figures 57–59

Figure 57. A colossal bejeweled Buddha from Chapel 23,
Tepe Sardar (image: ©MAIA)

تصویر ۵۷: مجمسه بزرگ بودا مزین شده با زیوات مکشوفه معبد ۲۳ تپه
سردار غزنی؛ نویسنده: لابیانکاه؛ حق کاپی رایت عکس، هیات باستان
شناسان ایتالیوی در افغانستان
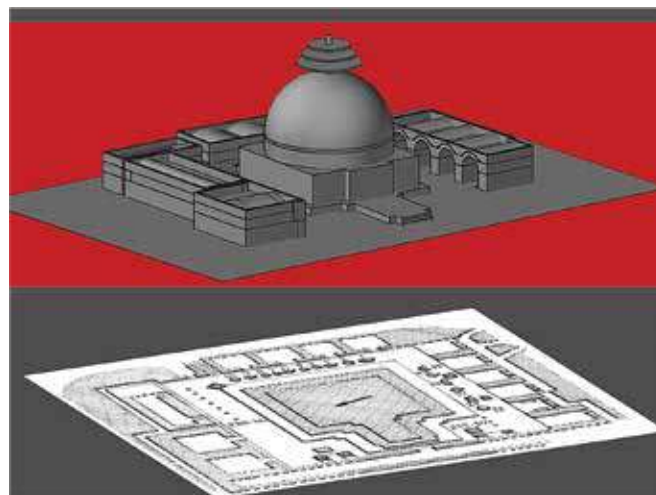
Figure 58. Tepe Sardar, Upper Terrace (image: Ground
plan by E. Paparatti; 3D graphics by D. Ebolese,
based on an original by D. Rosati; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۵۸: تصویر سه بعدی تراس بالایی تپه سردار غزنی؛ پلان
افتیده ساحه توسط ای. پاپاراتی؛ گرافیک سه بعدی توسط دی. ایبولس
بر اساس کاپی اصلی توسط دی. روساتی؛ هیات باستان شناسان ایتالیوی
در افغانستان
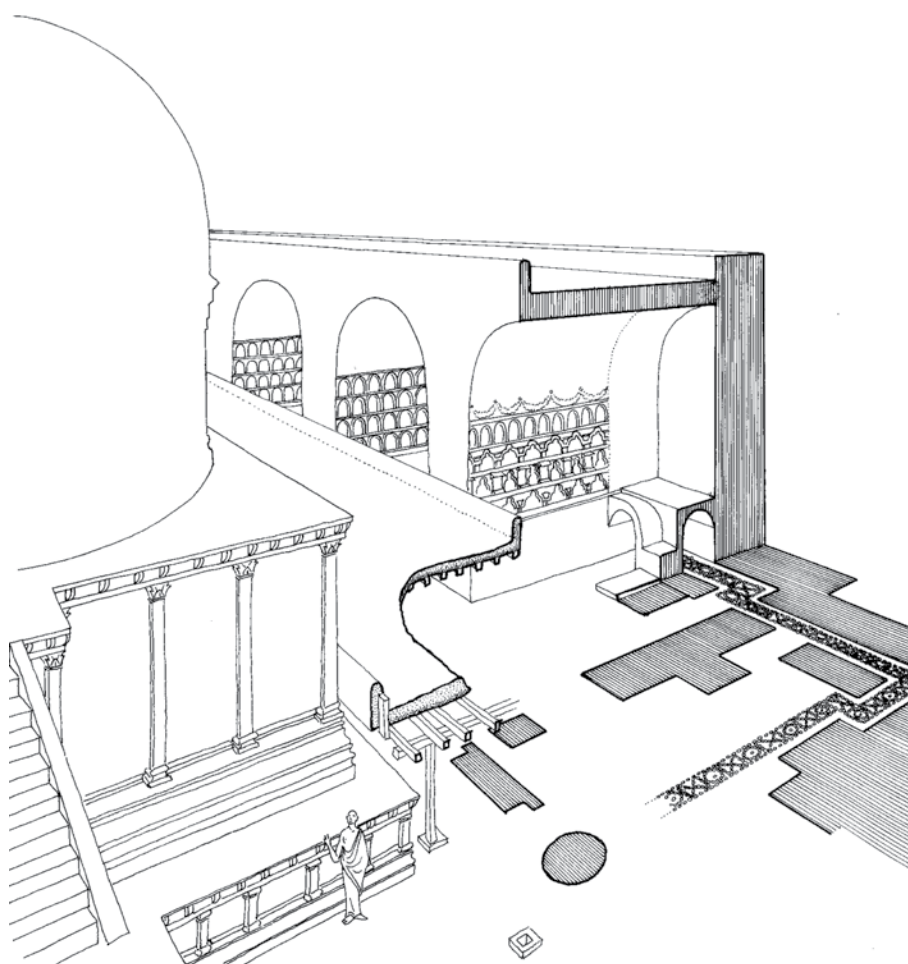
Figure 59. Tepe Sardar; partial axonometric view of the Upper Terrace
(image: E. Paparatti; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۵۹: نمای اکسونو متریک تراس بالایی تپه سردار غزنی؛ مؤلف: ای. پاپاراتی؛
هیات باستان شناسان ایتالیوی در افغانستان

Figure 60. Preliminary sketch
of Chapel 17, Tepe Sardar
(image: E. Paparatti; modified
by A. Filigenzi; ©MAIA)
تصویر ۶۰: اسکیچ مقدماتی معبد ۱۷
تپه سردار؛ عکس: ای. پاپاراتی؛
هیات باستان شناسان ایتالیوی در
افغانستان
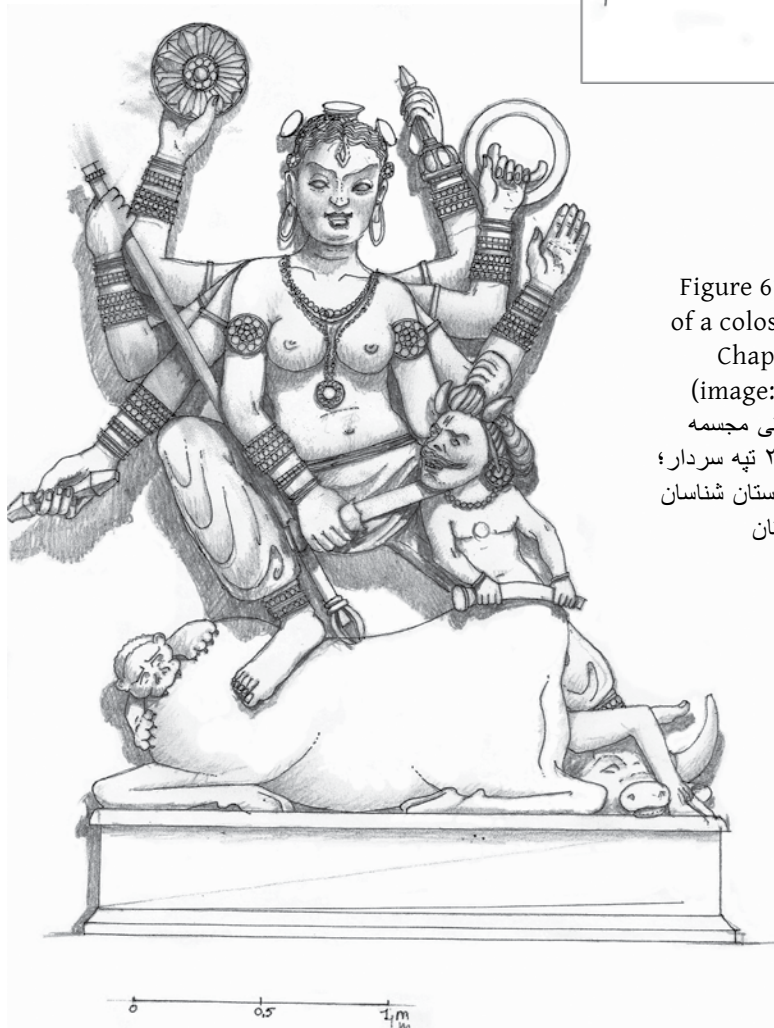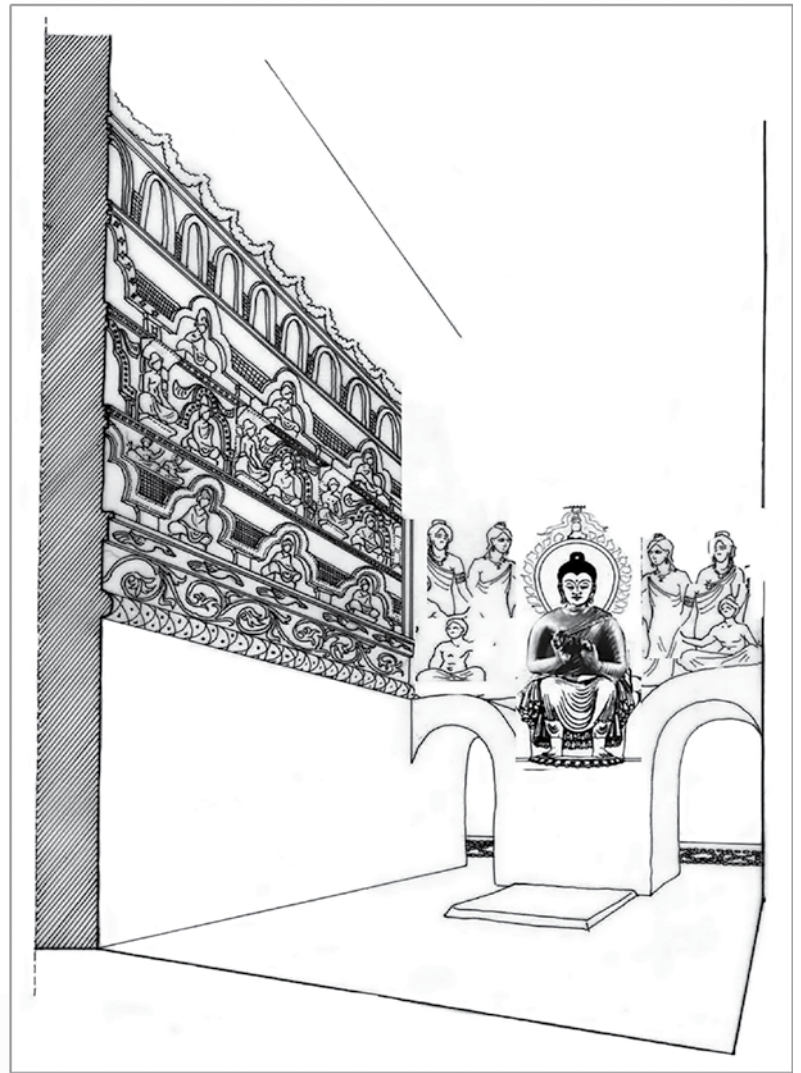
Figure 61. Preliminary sketch
of a colossal Durgā statue from
Chapel 23, Tepe Sardar
(image: F. Martore; ©MAIA)
تصویر ۶۱: اسکیچ مقدماتی مجسمه
بزرگ دُرگا، مکشوفه معبد ۲۳ تپه سردار؛
عکس: اف. مارتور؛ هیات باستان شناسان
ایتالیوی در افغانستان

Figure 62. Mes Aynak, Chapel 32N; the oblong socle for a lost image of Durgā (photo: A. Filigenzi)

تصویر ۶۲: مس عینک، معبد ساحه ۳۲؛ جایکه احتمالا مجسمه ازبین رفته دُرگا وجود داشته؛ عکس: انا فلیگنزی

Figure 63. Moulded decoration with a mask of Okeanos, from Tepe Sardar (left) and Mes Aynak (right) (photos: Tepe Sardar ©MAIA; Mes Aynak after AAVV 2011 fig. p. 32)

تصویر ۶۳: چهره اوکئانوس، مکشوفه تپه سردا (چپ) و مکشوفه مس عینک (راست)؛ عکس تپه سردار: هیات
ایتالیوی؛ عکس مس عینک: گزارش حفریات مس عینک ۲۰۱۱، ص: ۳۲.

Figure 64

Figure 64. Tepe Sardar, Upper Terrace; a partial view of the row of *stūpas* and thrones and in the foreground, Throne 6
(photo: F. Bonardi; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۶۴: تپه سردار، تراس بالایی، نمای قسمتی از ردیف استوپه ها و سکو ها؛ سکو (تخت) نمبر ۶ در قسمت پائینی تصویر؛ تصویر: ف. بوناردی: کاپی
رایت هیات ایتالیوی

Figures 65–66
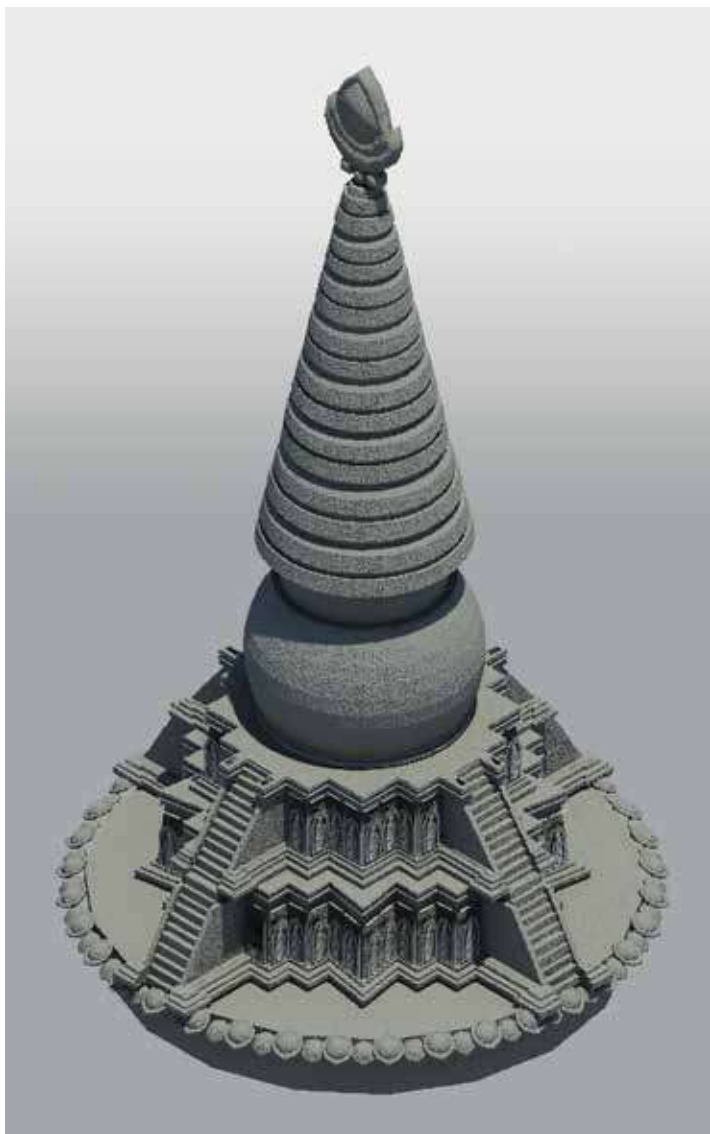
Figure 65. Tapa Sardar, Upper Terrace; a preliminary 3D
reconstruction of *stūpa* 8 (image: C. Passaro; ©MAIA)
تصویر ۶۵: تپه سردار، تراس بالایی: طرح سه بعدی مقدماتی استوپه
نمبر ۸؛ صاحب امتیاز: سی. پاسارو؛ هیات ایتالیوی
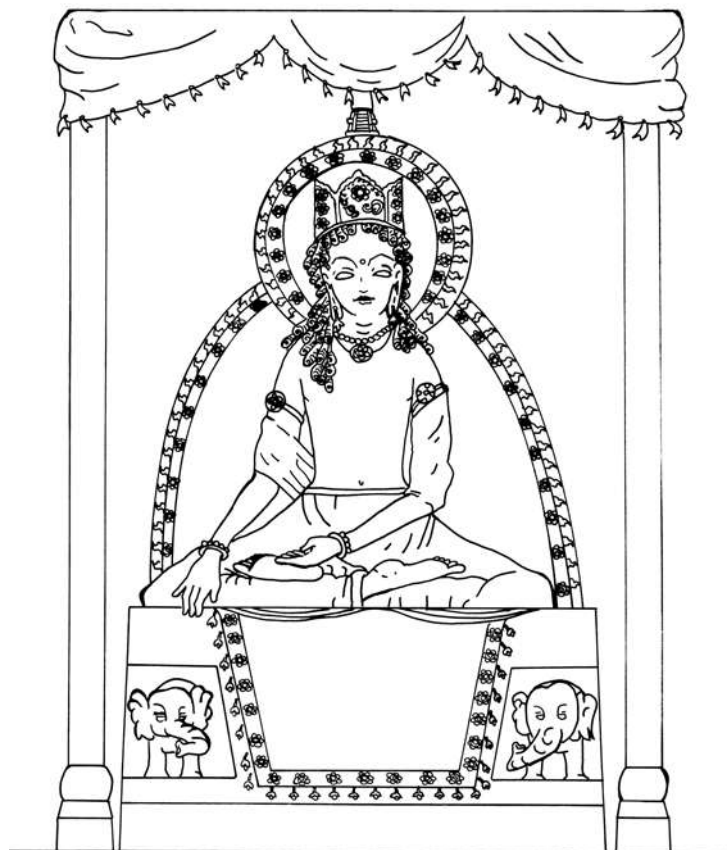
Figure 66. Tapa Sardar, Upper Terrace; a preliminary sketch
reconstruction of Throne 6 (image: A. Fedele; ©MAIA)
تصویر ۶۶: تپه سردار، تراس بالایی: اسکیچ مقدماتی بازسازی تصویری
تخت (سکو) نمبر ۶؛ صاحب امتیاز؛ ای. فیدل؛ هیات ایتالیوی

Figure 67. Ghazni, the Palace; a marble slab from the central courtyard with geometric and phytomorphic motifs and epigraphic band on top
(photo: U. Scerrato; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۶۷: لوحه تزئنی از سنگ مرمر با تزئینات هندسی و در قسمت بالای آن نوشته به رسم الخط کوفی، قصر دوره عزنویان، غزنی؛ هیات ایتالیوی
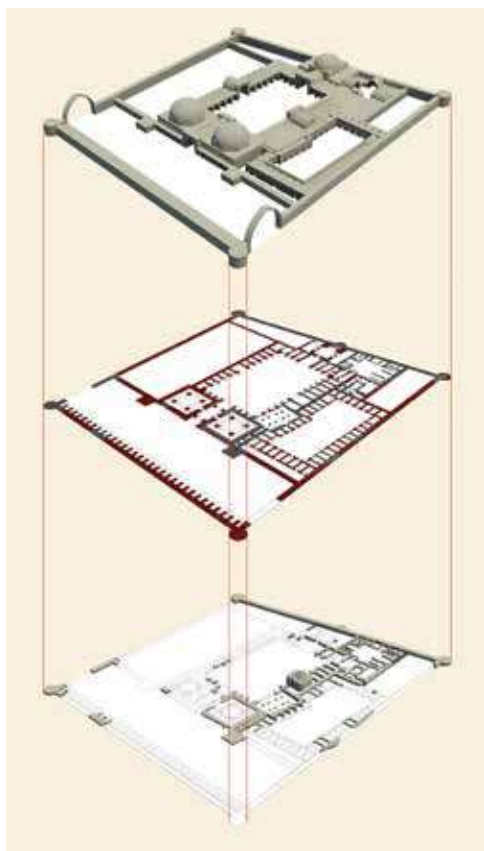
Figure 68. Ghazni, the Palace; 3D graphics based on the original ground plan
(image: C. Passaro; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۶۸: طرح سه بعدی قصر غزنی بر اساس پلان افتیده اصلی ساحه؛ صاحب امتیاز: سی. پاسارو؛ هیات ایتالیوی

Figure 69. Ghazni, the Palace; hypothetical reconstruction of the antechambers around the court
(image: C. Passaro; ©MAIA)

تصویر ۶۹: طرح فرضی اتاق های اطراف حویلی مرکزی قصر غزنی؛ صاحب امتیاز: سی. پاسارو؛ هیات ایتالیوی

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